

971  
Collection  
Military Order



of the

Loyal Legion

of the

—\*— United States.

---



---

COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

---



---

WAR PAPER 9.

Incidents of the Blockade, 1861-'65.





# Military Order of the Boyal Legion

OF THE

United States.



COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.



WAR PAPERS.

9

*Incidents of the Blockade.*

PREPARED BY COMPANION


Rear Admiral

**JOHN J. ALMY,**

U. S. Navy,

AND

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF FEBRUARY 3, 1892.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/incidentsofblock00almy>

## Incidents of the Blockade.

1861-1865.

---

These were many and various. The writer commanded the U. S. Steamer *Connecticut* on the blockade off Wilmington, N. C., for fourteen months, and during that period captured and sent in four steamers, viz., *Juno*, *Scotia*, *Minnie*, and *Greyhound*, with valuable cargoes; vessels and cargoes adjudged worth \$1,063,352.49. The *Connecticut* run ashore and destroyed four other blockade-runners, viz., *Phantom*, *Herald*, *Ceres*, and *Diamond*.

The blockade-runners would always select dark nights to run in and out, and certain stages of the moon; generally between the last and first quarters of the moon, when it set early and rose late. This moon arrangement was always a matter of great importance to them. Then a tolerably high tide, also, entered into the calculation.

The first blockade-runner captured by the *Connecticut* was the *Juno*. It was a bright pleasant morning off shore, and out about 70 miles from Wilmington, when, at daylight, she was discovered. Chase was immediately given, and in three hours she was a prize. When the captain was brought on board he was greeted with the usual "Good morning," with the additional remark, "Glad to see you," to which he replied, "D—d if I am glad to see you." "I suppose not," I remarked. I didn't blame him at all, for to him it was becoming acquainted under very unpleasant conditions.

A week before, the *Juno* had safely run the blockade *in*—had discharged her English cargo, had taken on board the usual

Confederate American cargo of cotton, tobacco, and turpentine, and was now bound to Nassau.

Among other letters found on board of the *Juno* was one left open and unfinished, commenced at Wilmington and addressed to the owners in England, in which the captain described the successfully running *in* by the sleepy-headed Yankees at night, and that he expected to be lucky enough in running *out*, of which he would inform them upon his arrival at Nassau, when he would close and send his letter. But the said letter never reached Nassau nor England.

These blockade-runners were all English steamers, and were painted lead-color, which was to prevent their being discovered at night, when running close in along the land. The fire and steam arrangements were for burning the soft English coal, which always made much black smoke, by which they could be discovered a long distance in the day. The smoke could sometimes be seen before the vessel was visible.

We have heard and we have read of the excitement on board of a whale-ship produced by the cry of the look-out at the mast-head—"Spout O!" A whale in sight; boats are quickly got ready for lowering, with harpoons, lines and lances, and the ship steered for the prey.

On board of the *Connecticut*, when the look-out at the mast-head sung out, "Black smoke!" all was commotion. Every one was upon his feet, and all eyes and the ship's head turned in the reported direction; all steam was raised, and the chase commenced.

A chase of this kind once lasted *fifteen* hours. Black smoke was discovered at sunrise, pursuit was commenced, and continued until after dark, when the blockade-runner was lost sight of. But the *Connecticut* got within two miles of her, making a gain of *ten* miles, as it was estimated that she was twelve miles off when first discovered. To enable her to escape she

had to throw overboard nearly all her cargo, which comprised English goods, as she was bound *in*. We passed through and by innumerable bales and boxes during the day, some of which we perceived contained shoes, which caused a waggish sailor to remark: "Perhaps if we could get and put on some of those shoes, we could run faster and catch that fellow."

We will continue with the further movements of this blockade-runner steamer, which will be found interesting. Subsequently she proved to be the *Tristram Shandy*.

As has been stated, she threw overboard nearly all her cargo, went into Nassau, filled up hurriedly with another cargo and steamed for Wilmington, ran the blockade, and got in. In order to have the dark of the moon, she unloaded with great dispatch, and loaded with the usual Confederate cargo and sailed for Nassau. When she got a few miles outside she was discovered by the U. S. Steamer *Pequot*, which gave chase. It soon became very dark, and the *Pequot* lost sight of her, but continued the chase on the same course as when the blockade-runner was last seen. In a few minutes a tremendous volume of black smoke from the soft coal came into the faces of the people on board the *Pequot*, and in a minute afterwards she was up with the blockade-runner, and the *Tristram Shandy* was captured. She had broken down. The captain of her stated that the *Connecticut* had chased her so hard those *fifteen* hours that the machinery was very much out of order, and that he hadn't time to adjust and repair it, as he had to hurry so much to get out of Nassau and Wilmington in order to save the moon and the tides; so the *Connecticut* was the remote cause of the capture of the *Tristram Shandy* with her valuable cargo. Both vessel and cargo were adjudged by the Prize Court to be worth \$375,000. Added to this was the cargo thrown overboard when chased by the *Connecticut*, all of which was a great loss to the Confederate cause.

One Saturday night, off the *Western Bar*, one of the inlets into Wilmington, was an exciting one for blockaders, and for blockade-runners also. There was no time to indulge in Saturday-night songs and revelries, and to drink to "Sweethearts and Wives."

We knew that blockade-runners were expected. The tides and the state of the moon were favorable for them. The moon went down early. Orders had been given that at *that* time every vessel should have her anchor up, with steam up, and ready to start. The vessels, four in number—*Connecticut*, *Georgia*, *Emma*, and *Buckingham*—were swinging about, and a little steam used to keep them in their assigned positions. They were like restless race-horses awaiting the order to "Go!"

The officer of the deck was lying down upon his stomach on the hurricane-deck sweeping the horizon with his glass when he reported that there was something moving upon the water like a blockade-runner. The commander looked, and confirmed the report. Orders were immediately given to start, and move with full speed. Two shotted guns were fired at her, when she changed her course, stood off under full speed, and was lost sight of. In this move she met with the *Georgia*, which vessel started after her and drove her off. She was faster than most of our vessels, and in the dark, as it was, she could soon run out of sight. Continuing in her persistency to enter, the *Emma* met her and drove her off. But she wasn't going to give it up. She had now stood pretty well over towards Smith's Island, thinking she might get in by running close along the land. And now the *fourth* time she attempted it, when the *Buckingham* espied her, opened her guns, and drove her off. As we didn't see nor hear anything more of her that night, we supposed that she had gone out to sea, to try it perhaps another night, which they frequently did.



But at day-break the next morning, lo and behold! there was the steamer hard and fast ashore. She had been forced off and shoved over so many times that she was nearer the land than she calculated, and had run badly ashore. Attempts were made by our vessels to get her off, which was found impossible. A few days after, a gale of wind came on, which broke the vessel to pieces. She was found to be the noted English blockade-runner *Herald*. The officers and crew had left in their boats, and landed on Smith's Island in the dark of the night.

This steamer had been running between Bermuda and Charleston, had made ten or twelve successful trips, and had paid for herself several times over. She had now changed her blockade-running route to between Nassau and Wilmington, which proved bad luck to her, as she was wrecked on this her first trip.

And now came up the question of law *versus* common sense.

The *Connecticut* had captured a schooner laden with salt, a cargo not worth more than three or four hundred dollars. By throwing the salt overboard, five or six thousand dollars' worth of valuable goods could be taken from the *Herald* and put on board of the schooner, which was done. This would naturally be deemed *common sense*. But the law says that "No person in the Navy shall take out of a prize any goods before the same shall be adjudged lawful prize by a competent court."

This proceeding was duly reported to the Navy Department, but nothing was ever said in the way of approval or disapproval of the matter.

The chief engineer of the *Connecticut* was a zealous, patriotic person, and was well up to his duties in every particular. In the hard chase after the *Tristram Shandy* of fifteen hours which has been described, it occurred to the captain to step

down into the boiler and engine rooms to take a look at matters. Upon reaching there, the chief engineer remarked: "Captain, these boilers have now been run for many months in chasing blockade-runners, and they are getting tender. They are under a heavy strain to-day, and I advise you to keep on deck." The captain replied that if there was danger, he didn't know why he shouldn't share it with the engineer. "But," said the engineer, "your post of duty is on deck, and mine is here. I shipped for this, and if the boilers go, it is my privilege and my duty to stick to and go with them." Upon reflection, and deeming "discretion the better part of valor," the captain left, and went on deck. The boilers stood it, however. Here was a brave typical engineer, of which the service can boast of many such.

Love and matrimony once came in as an incident in the course of this blockade service. Sea-ports might be blockaded, but loving hearts never, though hard-hearted parents sometimes attempt it.

When the *Greyhound* was captured—vessel and cargo adjudged by the Prize Court to be worth about half a million of dollars—among the passengers on board was the noted Belle Boyd, who had been a prisoner before, in the war, in the hands of Genl. Butler, between whom there had been a considerable amount of "unpleasantness," which had made her somewhat famous by her general conduct, with her speeches and pertness. The *Greyhound* was taken to Boston, and, after having been adjudged lawful prize and condemned, Belle Boyd, with the other passengers, the officers and crew, were all released and permitted to go where they pleased. From Boston they went to Halifax, and from thence to England.

The prize-master of the *Greyhound* was a young volunteer officer, with the rank of acting-master in the United States Navy—rather a good-looking fellow. It seems that while on

board of the *Greyhound* together he and Belle Boyd became greatly interested in each other, which ripened into affectionate friendship. After they separated at Boston, a fervent correspondence sprung up and was continued between them, and they became engaged. She fascinated the prize-master to that degree that he turned traitor. He resigned from the Federal Navy, proceeded to England, and they were married in Liverpool, he, from that time, espousing the cause of, and fighting for, the South.

Subsequently she wrote an interesting book of her life and adventures, in which she gives a graphic account of all the incidents relating to her courtship and marriage. Her career was certainly full of the most eventful, heroic, and romantic features; a career softened and varied at the same time, and which showed that hearts could be captured as well as blockade-runners.

It may not be generally known, or it may have been forgotten by persons, that Belle Boyd was the daughter of Genl. Boyd, of the Confederate Army, who died while a prisoner to the Federal forces. He possessed vast estates in Virginia, early embraced the cause of Southern independence, and was soon entrusted with a general's command. His daughter Belle enthusiastically embraced the same cause, followed her father to the field and accompanied him throughout his campaign, and on two occasions heroically, as a modern Joan of Arc, led on the troops to battle. She was, however, in a skirmish, captured and made prisoner for *thirteen* months, when she was exchanged for Genl. Cochrane, who had been made prisoner by the Confederates.

Loud and frequent complaints were made by the public, during the war, of what they termed "inefficiency of the blockade" by the frequent running in and out of vessels.

The Hon. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, in his annual

report in December, 1865, a few months after the war had ended, stated in that report that the following number and class of vessels had been captured or destroyed during the war in attempting to run the blockade, viz: steamers, 295; sailing ships, barks, and brigs, 44, and 683 schooners, making a total of 1,022 vessels. The amount adjudicated by the courts for prizes captured and brought in was \$24,500,000.

The estimated amounts for those run ashore, burnt, and destroyed was \$7,000,000, making a total of \$31,500,000—a pretty good showing, I should say.

It certainly hurt and weakened the enemy badly. It cut off numerous and necessary supplies, and it lost them the revenue from their cotton, tobacco, and turpentine. In short, it did much to bring the war to a close.







